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## Social Action for Busy Professionals: Changing the World in an Hour

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### IN THIS CHAPTER

#### *Activities that take:*

- *less than an hour/month*
- *an hour/month*
- *more than an hour/month*

#### *Resources*

### Lifelong use of skills learned by doing community pediatrics

Many pediatricians spend time working with their communities on various projects or serving as a volunteer, either through the local schools or other community organizations. Perceived time constraints and a lack of adequate funding may keep some pediatricians from participating more, others may feel that they do not have enough time to make a valuable impact. However, it is very possible to contribute toward a larger cause even with very small investments of time or money. Setting priorities and identifying easy ways to participate in community activities can be a pediatrician's first step toward a more invested relationship with the community.

### Practice Passive Activism

Some forms of action on behalf of kids take virtually no time at all. This is called passive activism. Passive activism involves making a simple lifestyle choice.

- Lookout for programs through your bank, credit card, or telephone company that contribute to a good cause. For example, it is possible to purchase personalized checks that contribute to organizations such as Save the Children or credit cards that give a certain percentage to childhood cancer research. Just by doing everyday activities that you normally do, it is possible to contribute toward improving child health.
- Vote with Your Shopping Dollars. All consumer choices have social implications. What kind of car you drive affects air pollution, dependence on foreign oil, and so on. Where you buy a house determines where your property taxes go. Some clothes are made in sweatshops that exploit children, while others are not. Where you shop determines where your sales taxes will go: rich outer suburbs or needier urban areas, for example. The political implications of your purchases can't be the only factor in your spending decisions, but being aware of them can sometimes offer pain-free ways of making a difference that takes zero extra time.

## Activities that Take Less than an Hour a Month

- Vote! Even if by absentee ballot!
- Donate to a political campaign or a nonprofit organization. Donating will obviously cost you money, but takes no time. And donations to nonprofit groups are generally tax deductible.
- Put together a resource guide of CBOs in your community that you can refer your patients to as needed.
- Use the media wisely: What do you listen to on the radio? Watch on TV? Subscribe to? Consider subscribing to a pediatric journal or listening to a local radio station that informs listeners of local community events.
- Sign up for listservs. Make the local newspaper's Web site your home page, so that you can get quick updates on what's going on in your community easily and for free.
- If you own any stocks, vote your proxy ballots in a socially responsible way. Reduction of mercury pollution is one example of a shareholder campaign that has improved the health of children.
- Power Letter Writing. The easiest way to write a letter to a government representative is to have someone else write it but you sign it yourself, and send it by clicking a button. Signing up for the e-mail listserv of an organization you support easily sets up such a service. The organization will keep track of important issues and do much of the work for you.

There are a variety of community health resources available. **TABLE 1** lists commonly found CBOs.

## Activities That Take About an Hour a Month

### Write a Letter to a Public Official

### Write a Letter to the Editor

### Testify Before Official Bodies: Courts, Legislatures, Etc.

- Being willing to write or to speak out can be very important. One example of this took place in Rochester, NY. Recently, the county executive tried to cut various social services for kids while increasing subsidies to businesses. The public outrage from citizens, including many pediatricians, led to the executive's own party overriding his budget veto and saving the children's services.
- Writing letters to the editor on a provocative issue can draw needed attention and press. For example, a Miami pediatrician regularly writes editorials in the *Miami Herald*. Over the past few years, she has highlighted important issues such as teenage pregnancy, youth violence, and child health insurance. By writing about these important topics in the local press, this pediatrician has been able to both educate the public as well as draw attention to specific issues around each topic.
- Testifying at a county legislative meeting can take anywhere from just a few minute to a couple of hours. And the impact is tremendous. A pediatrician's expert testimony can lead to the passing of an important bill that positively affects child health.

**TABLE 1:**

### Community Health Resources

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Social service agencies  
 Child welfare agencies  
 Children with special health care needs program  
 Early intervention program  
 Maternal and child health program  
 Immunization and well child clinics  
 Lead poisoning prevention and screening programs  
 School health programs  
 Community-based organizations relating to children

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To contact a government agency, use the **BLUE** pages at the front of the phone book.

## Activities That Take More Than an Hour a Month

### Speak Out

People pay attention to a physician who takes the time to meet with a legislator or speak at a public hearing. By participating with a CBO, the resident can become informed about important legislation and boost the CBO's lobbying efforts. An example of this is a resident who became a local media expert on children's nutrition just because she was a doctor volunteering with a food bank. It didn't take her much time to talk to reporters, but the publicity was a huge boost for her CBO's cause.

### Campaign

The next time an election comes around, don't simply sit back and watch from a distance. Get involved! Study the candidates and their issues by reading and watching their debates. Then choose a candidate and volunteer.

### Register Voters

In some communities, residents can check out a registration book and register voters on the spot. Residents can also let people know about absentee ballots. Pediatricians can get many parents registered by putting the forms in the clinic waiting room.

### Apply for Grants

Most projects of substance need financial support. A surprising amount of grant money is available for those who take the time to research and apply. Writing grant applications is a skill that improves with practice and can be a valuable tool throughout life.

### Gaining Representation on Boards and Councils

To gain representation on a community board or council, first find the agency or council that supports members' having a voice in governing. Ask about becoming an advisor to the program. Boards of agencies often meet for about one hour every three months.

### Other Actions You Can Take: Advanced Activism

- Volunteer.
- Work at a free clinic.
- Start an organization for a cause that needs one.
- Become a philanthropist.
- Run for office!

While the activities at the end of this chapter may be very demanding, the ones at the top are within everyone's reach. You can make a difference.

## Resources

Lewis BA. *The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose—And Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1998.

Community Toolbox: Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development. Community Toolbox: Bringing solutions to life. University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/>

Grants Web

[www.research.sunysb.edu/research/kirby.html](http://www.research.sunysb.edu/research/kirby.html)

Nonprofit Gateway: Federal Citizen Information Center, Office of Citizen Services and Communications. FirstGov for Nonprofits. [www.nonprofit.gov](http://www.nonprofit.gov)

The Foundation Center

[www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)